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Statistical Evidence for Representation Preferences in the form of Context-Specific VAK Profiles

Introduction

In an academic context, Grinder and Bandler's claim (in 1979) that they were the first to observe lateral eye movements sounds somehow outrageous when confronted with all the earlier findings about the laterality of the brain hemispheres in respect to eye movements. This may be one of the reasons why it is proving so difficult to convince the academic community that although Bandler and Grinder, in the words of O'Connor and Seymour, "were not the first to note the eye movements we make when thinking [i.e. accessing information], they were the first to link them systematically to thinking and language" (1994, p30).

Bandler and Grinder made a clear functional distinction between two phenomena: the eye movement patterns of a subject while *accessing* information and the representation systems in verbal expression, while *processing* information. The latter can be observed by sensory-based preferences in the selection of predicates of three kinds: visual, auditory, and bodily sensations and feelings* (1979, chapter 1). A number of studies have attempted to relate the type of sensory predicates of a subject with their observed eye accessing cues. In accordance with the NLP idea that the two systems are independent, no such correlation has been found (Bliemeister, 1988; Dorn et al., 1983; Elich et al. 1985; Salas, 1989; Les Cross, 1995).

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* When speaking of different kinds of perception to a neurologist, you may establish better rapport if you translate the term "kinesthetics", introduced by Bandler and Grinder, into "somato-visceral perception."

However, these investigators assumed that NLP actually proposes such a correlation by postulating a generalized Preferred Representation System for every subject. An earlier statement by Grinder and Bandler probably led to this mis-interpretation: "Identifying the most highly valued Representation System" (1976, p9). A series of other studies produced data which, in two cases, showed no evidence for significant concentration in only one sensory channel of eye accessing cues (Baddeley, 1991; Parr, 1986), but two other studies with different methodology observed data supporting the existence of a Preferential System (Dooley, 1988; Sandhu, 1991). As to the three representation systems detected by sensory predicates, three studies found non-supportive data for a significant preference (Cassiere et al., 1987; Dorn, 1983; Graunke and Roberts, 1985), while other investigators reported in favor of such a preferential system (Fromme and Daniell, 1984; Mercier and Johnson, 1984; Wilbur and Roberts,1987).

Thus, on the one hand we have conflicting experimental evidence about the "Primary Representation Systems" and on the other we have Grinder and Bandler's comment that by its very nature this construct cannot be investigated properly by using statistics (1979; and foreword to Dilts et al. 1980). All this created a vacuum around a central construct in NLP. More investigation with a variety of methods is definitely in order.

Methods
The present study was conducted on the presupposition that similar contexts are represented by different subjects in distinct representation systems; but the same subject may also use distinct representation systems in different contexts. In order to compare the preferences of a number of subjects, identification of similar contexts was needed. During this study only emotionally-relevant contexts were considered. These were further specified, as follows:

"Positive and negative emotions": Bandler pointed out that negative experiences are better *seen* than *felt*. Observing them at a distance yields a better evaluation and more alternatives than getting stuck in bad feelings about them (1985). This also suggests a recommendable representation for positive experiences. If distinct representation systems work quite differently in positive and negative con-